

Chair Flexer, Chair Fox, Ranking Members Sampson and Mastrofrancesco, and Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee,

As the Alder of New Haven's 21st ward and on behalf of the Steering Committee of Voter Choice CT, I write to express my support for HB 6578 and SB 753. Both bills would seek to begin to redress historic injustices in our state that unfairly reduce the power of underserved Black and brown communities. Both bills would move us closer to the fundamental principle of one person, one vote.

In registering voters in the inner city Dixwell and Newhallville neighborhoods, I have had to inform citizens returning from incarceration that they were not eligible to register to vote as they were still on parole. It is disheartening and stands as an impediment to helping returning citizens as they reintegrate into society – we should seek to engage returning citizens in our civic life, not turn them away. Furthermore, on principle, these returning citizens are citizens and no citizen should be denied the right to vote.

We cannot ignore that these returning citizens are disproportionately Black and brown, and that denying them their voting rights serves to reinforce racist structural inequities in Connecticut. In similar vein, we must no longer tolerate the practice of prison gerrymandering, which increases the political representation and state funding of largely white rural communities at the expense of largely Black and brown urban centers. This egregious inequity is a present-day analogue of the US Constitution's three-fifths clause, the great structural imbalance in electoral power that the Connecticut delegation had the shameful role in introducing at the Constitutional Convention.

We can help to amend this present day inequity and recognize our state's role in historic inequities by advancing SB 753. The language of SB 753 should be written so as to allow for its provisions to take effect in time for prison gerrymandering to be eliminated from this 2021 redistricting cycle so that we are not continuing this heinous practice for another decade.

At a time when other states seek to limit and revoke the franchise, Connecticut should seek to protect and expand voting rights. Indeed, as other states seek to abridge voting as a privilege, we should recognize voting as a right, one that HB 6758 would restored to those on parole.

With this in mind, Connecticut should seek out opportunities to engage new voters as the participation of citizens through the right to vote is the bedrock of a functioning democracy. While HB 6578 codifies the current practices of automatic voter registration at the Department of Motor Vehicles, Connecticut should go further and extend automatic voter registration to other state agencies.

Sincerely,
Steve Winter
Alder, Ward 21, New Haven
Voter Choice CT Steering Committee